



U.S. Agency for
International
Development

Bureau for
Global Health

COUNTRY PROFILE

HIV/AIDS

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The first cases of HIV/AIDS in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) were identified in the early 1990s among sex workers and mobile populations. Despite higher rates of infection in neighboring countries, national adult HIV prevalence in Lao PDR remains low. Even in the populations most at risk, HIV prevalence is barely over 1 percent. But with HIV/AIDS increasing in

neighboring countries, the Lao PDR confronts the possibility of an epidemic emerging. Risk factors for a more widespread outbreak include proximity to the region's drug trafficking routes, increasing regional integration, and high levels of sexually transmitted infection in some populations. Injecting drug use is believed to be low or nonexistent, but no studies have been conducted to confirm this.

The first sentinel surveillance surveys in the country were conducted in 2000 among female sex workers at three sites; less than 1 percent of those surveyed were found to be HIV positive. Behavioral surveys conducted around the same time found that about three-quarters of female sex workers said they had consistently used condoms in the last month. About two-thirds of the police and military and about three-quarters of truck drivers reported always using condoms with a paid partner.

Estimated Number of Adults and Children Living with HIV/AIDS	1,400
Total Population (end 2001)	5,403,160
Adult HIV Prevalence (end 2001)	less than 0.1%
HIV-1 Seroprevalence in Urban Areas (end 2000)	
Population most at risk (sex workers and clients, patients seeking care for sexually transmitted infection, or other persons with known risk factors)	1.1%
Population at low risk (pregnant women, blood donors, or other persons with low risk factors)	0.4%

Sources: UNAIDS, U.S. Census Bureau.

NATIONAL RESPONSE



Map of Lao People's Democratic Republic: PCL Map Collection, University of Texas

The Lao PDR formed a National Committee for the Control of AIDS in the late 1990s and established a national plan to prevent further HIV transmission, to reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS on those infected, and to minimize negative social and economic consequences. Despite the expressed commitment to provide HIV-prevention services to at-risk populations, there is little local capacity to deliver community-based services. Nongovernmental organizations are not allowed under current law.

USAID SUPPORT

Until 1996, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided support to the Lao PDR on HIV/AIDS issues through its regional mission based in Thailand. When that office closed, USAID continued a

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small number of HIV/AIDS activities out of USAID/Washington. Because of the increase in HIV/AIDS prevalence and incidence in the region, USAID again opened a regional office in Bangkok in 2003 and has developed an HIV/AIDS strategy that provides both regional and country-specific activities. USAID country-specific HIV/AIDS support for Laos amounted to \$1 million both in FY 2002 and in FY 2003, up from \$320,000 in FY 2001.

The goal of USAID's HIV/AIDS assistance to the Lao PDR has been to strengthen the national response to HIV/AIDS. Activities have focused on improving HIV and behavioral surveillance to include mobile populations and others at high risk; strengthening prevention of and care for sexually transmitted infections; expanding condom social marketing, education, and behavior change activities to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS; and implementing education and prevention programs in selected target areas. In addition, USAID has supported surveillance and education activities aimed at slowing the cross-border transmission of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria between Thailand and the Lao PDR, and between Vietnam and the Lao PDR.

These efforts have resulted in increased condom sales, increased HIV/AIDS awareness through mass media communications, and completion of the first behavioral surveillance survey conducted in the country. This work has helped to educate and provide HIV prevention options for at-risk populations.

Future efforts under the new Mekong Regional Strategy will build on these country efforts and expand regional activities to prevent cross-border transmission.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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